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THE PULPIT AND THE AGE.

BY

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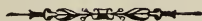
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THE PULPIT AND THE AGE.



PAUL writing to the Galatians takes his stand upon two points: First, his own personal position in relation to the Gospel; Second, the intrinsic nature of that Gospel in relation to the larger needs of the age. Something like this I will also venture to do.

You have called and I have answered gladly. But it is not your call that has made me a minister. I was a minister before any congregation called me. My election is of God. Paul speaks of "a faithful minister of the new covenant." Now, to a covenant there are two parties. In this covenant they are God and man. God's fulness meets man's need. The divine nature meets human nature, and the union is a wedlock, first made in heaven. It is set visibly forth in Christ. The minister of this covenant, therefore, the minister of Christ, has his call, first, in the nature of God and God's Truth; second, in the nature of man and man's need. We have on one side the divine Gospel; we have on the other the cry of the human. His call is constituted both by the divine election and by the requirements of human nature. Would that some who are sure of their election by God, were as sure of their election by man, and their fitness to adapt God's truth to human nature. It is not therefore the invitation of any particular congregation that makes a man a minister. It is a call which on the human side proceeds from the needs rather than from the wishes of mankind, from the constitution of human nature as set forth in Christ, rather than from the appointment by any section or group of men. I am here, not to meet all your requisitions, but to serve all your needs in Jesus Christ. You have not conferrèd on me my office, and I am Christ's servant more than yours, and yours for His sake. The minister is not the servant of the Church in the sense of any special community or organization. The old Latin theologians used to subscribe themselves V.D.M., Minister of the Word of God,—Minister not of the Church, but of that Christian human nature which our particular views and demands so often belie. A minister may, on occasion, never be so much of a minister as when he resists his congregation and differs from it. But neither is he any

true minister if he differs from his congregation in a way to forfeit their affection and respect. I will not undertake always to agree with you, but I will undertake to extort your respect, to pursue your co-operation, and wistfully to strive after your affection. The man who is always in opposition is either an inspired prophet like Jeremiah or Carlyle, or an impracticable fool.

As the Minister is the servant of the Church in the sense I have explained, so the Church is the servant of the Kingdom of God. It is one of the best signs of the Church to-day that it is more ready than ever before to recognise the Christianity outside the Church, and to admit that God has a controversy with men not covered by ecclesiastical discussions. That Church is the best Church which is most free to serve the needs of mankind and the kingdom of heaven. The Church, no more than the Minister, exists to meet men's expectations. St. Paul speaks (if we have the courage rightly to translate him) of the God of the period, the fashionable God. It was a deity in the most vivid contrast with the Hebrew God—the Eternal. Well, every period has its God, its current and popular way of thinking about God, and its favourite and distinctive way of serving God. And that is all very well and proper so long as the period does not insist on stereotyping its own religious fashion. The enormous freedom entrusted by God to His Church is there because of the enormous wealth and variety in the Kingdom of God. So rich and diversified is the Kingdom of God that His Church, which is to serve and hasten it, must be extremely flexible and free; it must resist, at least it must be free to resist upon occasion, the public outcry for this or that special mode of action as sole or supreme. To take one example: Mr. Arnold and a large portion of the public hold that the Church is a society for the promotion of goodness, or the production of right conduct. But the Church says, No, the Kingdom of God is not primarily behaviour, but a right spirit, a new heart, a new creature, a regenerate man, not simply an altered demeanour. And so the Church says, Our object is not to produce this or that course of conduct, but to produce men and women, and not men and women of a type either, but souls representing all the various wealth of individuality in Christ. Again, no one mode of action will give scope to all the energies of the Christian sphere. A very large section of the Christian public makes an imperious demand that the Christian Church shall devote itself to philanthropy. Well, no Christian Church is true to its Master if it do not stimulate men to philanthropy, especially amid the misery of an age like this. But Christianity is something more than philanthropy

after all, and the Christian has other virtues than benevolence, imperative as that is. And it must be open to any section of the Church, without prejudice, to devote itself to the cultivation of any branch of the kingdom's energies which seems to lie nearest to its hand and resource. It must be open to any Church to say, if it so deem, that it is a question for discussion how far even philanthropy is not a function rather of society in general than of specific religious communities. It is dangerous for a minister to be also an almoner, and it may not always be safe for a congregation.

And generally, it may be said that a Church is in itself an organic living body, and therefore, as such, beautiful and valuable for its own sake, like a human being or a human family, apart from such purposes of outward utility as it may be calculated to serve. Those who urge the aggressiveness of a Church do well. A Church should be aggressive, and if it is vital will be. But the case is sometimes overstated in the interests of what is conventionally called Christian work. As there are some sects who believe they alone preach the Gospel, so some admirably laborious Christians speak as if their form of work were the only kind of Christian activity deserving the name. To depreciate a Church which is not organised to the very utmost for this kind of thing, is like denying a family its right to exist because it fills no public office, or makes no direct contribution of labour to the community. A Church is like a family. It is a social unity in itself. It is the tenement of an unspeakably precious life, and its contribution may freely be more to the quality than to the area of Christ's kingdom, without being for that reason less acceptable to Him.

But there is a perversion of the social idea of the Church which needs to be deprecated on the other hand. It is the case in America, and it is to a somewhat grave extent the case here, that the chief expression given to the social idea of the Church is in the way of mere sociability. The true idea of Christian fraternity degenerates into the mere notion of religious sociability. Now, Jesus Christ did not come into the world to foster sociability. The best culture of the Christian life requires much more seclusion and reserve than it mostly receives. It was human brotherhood that Christ came to set up. We are more intimately bound in the truth of Christ to some whom we have never seen at all than to some whom we meet every week. The grand expression and distinctive act of the Church fraternity is in the Sacraments—in the tender dedication and reception of the young soul in Baptism, the solemn sense of the unearthly brotherhood in Communion, and the less awful and more frequent association of ourselves for

the Sacrament of the Word in worship and preaching. I regret the tendency to make little of the Sacramental side of our common religious life. It is our neglect of the Sacraments, our abandonment of their culture to the priestly party, that makes the strength of sacerdotalism. The more we dignify the Sacraments and assert our part in them, the more we weaken the power of the priest and destroy his exclusive place. We are prone to make too little of the Sacramental side of our Christian life and too much of the social, in the way, for example, of tea parties, entertainments, recreations. I should be sorry to see these things banished, but let them go if they are impoverishing the life which finds at the table of the Lord its chief refreshment and its chief fraternal bond. The Church, which for the sake of social intercourse, or even benevolent work, neglects its proper, special, quieter and more solemn Sacramental functions, is killing its Christian life in the eye. Its worship is not healthy, nor is its work. It is sacrificing the Sacraments, the sanctities, and will go on to sacrifice (like the Salvation Army) even the decencies of Christ to an order of activity which is in its nature lower, more external, and sure itself in the end to deteriorate for want of the inward food.

I have spoken of a third Sacrament, the Sacrament of the Word. It is the distinctively Protestant Sacrament, and it invests the pulpit with the dignity, if not the solemnity which elsewhere is bestowed on the altar. Among other regrettable tendencies of the hour is the disposition to depreciate the power of the spoken word. It exists both in the pew and in the pulpit itself. I know preachers who regard their Sunday duty with a contempt (which is evident), compared with the so-called practical work with which they fill five days of the week. And we are constantly pressed with the demand for short sermons. I believe myself that short sermons are mostly themselves too long. The man whose preaching is simply tolerated has no right to preach as long as ten minutes. The man whose preaching is welcomed has no right to be always as short as twenty. We listen gladly to political speeches of an hour, and the reason is that we have an interest, amounting to a passion for the subject. Let us have enough knowledge of the subject of religion as to choose only competent men for ministers, and let it be so real and passionate to us that we can take pleasure in what our prophet or expositor has to say for an hour if he likes. I don't hint that all sermons should be an hour long. But I do think short sermons are killing the pulpit and sending the people to the altar or the platform.

The preacher of the Word must regard its distribution as a Sacrament. He breaks to the people the living bread and in-

spires them with the wine of God. His speech is an act and generates acts. And the preaching of the Word in this high ideal of it is based upon two beliefs.

1. On the belief in a Revelation.

2. On the belief in the persuasibility of men.

1. The preacher must believe that God has revealed Himself and that that fact alone makes religion possible. Religion is not mere longing, nor is it the worship of our own ideas. It is a response to God's revelation of Himself. Without revelation religion is not possible. The preacher must have something to preach, a message from God. He does not imagine his Gospel; it comes to him. But this means nothing else than that God has first spoken. The first preacher of God was God Himself. He is not a lonely God, nor a silent. He never was nor can be such. It is His eternal nature and function to reveal Himself, to impart Himself. His going forth is from everlasting. Christianity starts from the eternal necessity and reality of revelation; or in other words, Christianity stands upon the Incarnation, which is the principle and summary of all Revelation, and a fact, not historic only, but historic because spiritual and eternal.

But is this by any denied? Yes; it is a truth which is thrown into the sharpest outline and definition by its denial on the part of those philosophers who are known as Agnostics. The plain Saxon of their position is that God has never spoken; that the power, whose product they confess we are, flung us sullenly forth without a word which we have any ears to hear. If He gave the word, and refused us an organ to lay hold of it, it is all the same as if He gave no word. If the power that produced us denied us ears, that means that He had either no desire or no power to be heard by us. No human soul has ever had a message from God, they say, and no human faculty is capable of receiving such message. The power that produced us was unable to maintain His communications with us, and must sit at the centre, like the polar ice from which the icebergs float clean away to melt and vanish in the infinite azure of the seas where ice cannot live. God, they tell us, is not only relatively a mystery, but the absolute mystery, of whom nothing whatever can certainly be said. And Christ, when he called Him Father, was under a rash delusion that anything about the divine nature could be known. Many Christians, while they deny that Reason is the criterion of Revelation, yet vigorously assert that it is its organ. But the Agnostics deny human faculty or Reason to be even the organ of Revelation. And yet they try to save Religion as a vague sense of mystery and an awed consciousness of power that

besets us before and behind. But Religion is not possible without the Revelation which they deny, and which is the preacher's charter and ground to be.

On the other hand, I cannot utterly refuse to regard these Agnostics as teachers sent from God. They have been in great measure called into existence by exaggerated and immodest statements made by some of the believers in God as to the extent of their knowledge of the divine nature. That nature has by some systematisers been so surveyed and mapped, its currents, processes, and transactions have been so fathomed and charted, with such minuteness of detail and such pretence of special information, that the natural modesty of the human soul has revolted and as usual the revolt has gone to the other extreme. We do not know everything about God, nor half as much as some believe they do. And it is well we should be brought to our sober senses on such a matter. But it is just as untrue to say we know and can know nothing about God. It is not Atheism it is true, but it is something which in the long and practical result will not be very far removed from it.

The statement of Christian doctrine has always been more or less determined by the dominant philosophic creed of the age. The Christian creeds grew out of conflict with the heresies, and were shaped in view of them. And the modern heresy of Agnosticism determines for us the most urgent, timely, and relevant significance of the Incarnation. It is in its shape as opposed to Agnosticism that it is the Gospel of the Age. The Incarnation is to be asserted as the principle of Revelation essential to Deity, in contrast with the principle of no Revelation or Agnosticism. All Christian philosophers must start from the principle of Revelation. Mysterious as God is, He is no absolute mystery. No religious philosophy is possible with a dumb God or deaf men. And Religion which has no philosophy has no solid ground.

But the preacher, who is also a Christian apostle must preach more than the mere idea of illumination under the head of Revelation. The Christian thought of the Incarnation has two factors—Manifestation and Redemption. There is John's favourite idea of the Word, and Paul's of the Cross. There is Revelation by light—the light which lighteth every man—and there is Revelation by darkness; Revelation on the one hand by Life, on the other by Death, of Him who is Lord both of Death and Life. The message of God is no mere statement made by God, but a person and an act embodying His own Self and Nature. It is God Himself that speaks. "Only God can represent God." We preach *Christ crucified*—a person in an act. It is not Revelation in the mere sense in which a Greek

philosopher would have conceived it—as a flash of discovery—but Revelation by Death. It is a religion not of cheery radiance only, but of sombre glory, stifled splendour, luminous gloom, and tragic might. The character of Christ is inseparable from the work of Christ, the image of the Father from the work of the Father. The character needed the cross. God could not only live but die. The living God is the dying God. The Sun of the divine righteousness could not only shine, but set and shine the more. The cross is imbedded in the very principle of Revelation. It is for the putting away of sin, but not for that alone. It is also for the illumination of the pure. The cross was in God before sin was in man, and it will be our central and vital principle still when sin has been clean destroyed. It is not an expedient or a medicine only. It is the Eternal principle of Eternal Life, which is always and only possible even to God by an Eternal Death.

This, then, is the first belief of the preacher or apostle—that God has spoken, that he is ever speaking in such overwhelming fashion as to us seems silence, that the whole of nature lives, moves, and has its being in the Supernatural and the whole of human life issues upwards in a Supernatural Christ.

2. His second belief is in the persuasibility of men. The grandest grandeur of God comes softliest home to man.* The divine Word or Reason is the utterance of God's intelligence to the intelligence (not merely the intellect) of men. The preaching of the Word is something more high and wondrous than the declaration of truth merely ancient, traditional, and authoritative. Declamatory and denunciatory preaching is the cheapest of all and the feeblest. It is your Forcible-feeble^s who do so much to bring the *Word* of the Gospel into public neglect and good-humoured contempt. But the preaching of the Word is the declaration of the *whole* counsel of God,—the whole reason, thought, and will of God. And by *whole* is meant whole in its proportions not in its extent. The whole of God was involved in our Creation and Redemption. It is a Gospel, therefore, which appeals to man in his completeness,—to man not as an emotional, or as an intellectual, or as a sinful vessel, but as a man, one and indivisible as God Himself is. It is the utterance of the Love of Him who *is* Love. It is the expression of Love in its most sweeping and masculine as well as its most tender and feminine sense. 'Amor est virilis,' says the sweet author of the Imitation. Preaching tends to become too feminine, and many favourite preachers differ from the great preachers of earlier times, in that their beauty of sentiment is not infused and braced with the like

* "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we *persuade* men."

vigour and sinew of understanding. Robert Hall was almost the last of that order. The preaching of the Word is the exposition of the Word of God with a passion and grasp something like adequate to its intrinsic dimensions of Truth. Preaching should be like what God is—impassioned thought. But it is thought rather in its depth than in its range, and it is the passion whose whisper is often more piercing than its shout. It is more effective by quietude than by magnificence, and becoming incarnate in much humiliation it impresses rather by its victorious calm than by its militant force. The quiet preacher, if he have mind enough to get to reality, and enough morals to ring true, is among the mightiest pulpit powers. His reality preaches for him in much plainness of speech. The passion and tragedy which thought sees in life may beat in the simplest phrase. The sweetest and most potent words in human language are neither gilt with the charm of sentiment nor ranged in the pomp of a period. Yet they cover the Eternal passion and conquer the Eternal pain. They stand not in “an endless peace without passion, but in an endless passion without dispeace.” And they are perhaps these, “Come unto me “all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek “and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” And the exposition of the Word is more than the exposition of Scripture. It is the exposition of the Bible within the Bible. It is the exposition of a Word that shall endure when all the Bibles in the world are burned up. The identification of the Bible with the Word of God has much hampered preaching, which is the exposition of Christ. Yet I, for my part, mean to do more than I have ever done in the expounding of Scripture. The Bible in our age has been almost rediscovered. It has undergone what classical literature underwent at the Renaissance. It is glowing and bursting with new and rich life, thought, and emotion. The Bible was never so rich as the abused critics have made it; and depend upon it the Bible cannot take its true and supreme place without Christ taking a truer and supreamer place than before. Christ has in some quarters suffered from a wrong kind of respect for the Bible. Claims have been made for the Bible which many people, who are yet not sons of perdition, have resented. But such people are open and longing for the light of the Word, Christ, who is the power and the wisdom of God. No religious need of this age is deeper than the need for the Revelation of God to its mind and thought. If the *mind* of this century were Christian with all its enthusiasm of humanity, what a volume of faith and power would be brought to deal with the age’s sin and misery. But the

Christian instincts of the soul are chilled and bewildered by the gulf between its religion and its thought, and the general air is too cold and incredulous for the best blossoms of Christian achievement.

Yet the mind and spirit of the universe is Christian. God is Christian. The soul of things is Christian. The things of the soul are Christian. The conquest of human thought by Christ can be but a matter of time and freedom. Give us room and light and air. Christ is the truth men's minds were made for. Let us preach Christ. Let us take courage. Let us only believe in our Christian selves. If only we had a little more courage, a little more magnanimity in our religion, a little more faith in our own Gospel, a little more trust in what our creed can do for us, rather than we have for our creed! We want outspoken men,—men not afraid of strong things, and men with enough knowledge for ballast; and we want them both to preach and to hear and to act. The strongest things ever said in the world were said by Christ and by Paul, and the most reckless things, if they were not true. So let us ask if statements are substantially mightily true, rather than if they are measured. The measure we want is the measure of the fulness of Christ. But that we must have—the Christ, I mean, as well as the fulness. We want men, it is true, and fearless men,—men able on occasion to withstand their very brethren to the face. But above all, we must have men who are able and obliged to do this for a particular reason and in a particular strength. We want men who are men because of Christ,—men whom Christ has made men, and who feel they owe their manhood to Him. It is not a pagan but a Christian manhood we want in our pulpits and elsewhere. It is a manhood that is debtor to Jesus Christ for its own self and is never weary of constantly and variously, directly and indirectly, consciously and unconsciously, acknowledging the obligation.

The ministry cannot go on as a mere tolerated survival from an out-grown age and a creed out-worn. Your minister cannot with self-respect hold his place as a mere social or religious propriety. He is beneath himself if he be there as a mere utility-man, or religious hack. He is in the idea of him your blessing and your pride. Do you believe the minister of Christ has a *real* place in modern society? Does he satisfy a real need or a fictitious one? Is he deeply indispensable or sadly inevitable? Is he a real producer, factor, contributor in the body politic? I could lay my hands on a small book on political economy where he is reckoned with as a non-producer. It all depends on the quality of his Gospel. Has he anything with which to meet, and not only to meet but to kindle and satisfy

the peculiar aspirations of the age? Can he still help God to make men? If he can, then no producer is so indispensable as he.

The minister of a Christian Gospel is deeply required by the spirit of a time which is so Christian in many of its best and most characteristic instincts. He has much to teach and much to learn. Let him gladly do both. I welcome the spirit of the age. I do fear the spirit of the world. Nothing is for Christianity so formidable, so hard to eradicate as that. But the spirit of the age I do not fear. The Father worketh hitherto, and we work. The results which please Him best in His world may not always be those which His believers directly see and consciously produce. There is such a thing as the Spirit of God over and above the Church of God, and purposes of His are ripening in the growth of human faculty, which He may see cause to prize more than some very eager efforts of ours. God is leading the world where we have no hold of it, and He may be trusted not to lead it backwards.

The Christianity required to-day must be at least four things.

1. It must be real and positive. It must have the air of reality which the best public of the day demands in the treatment of great affairs. More and more, religion must part, and the pulpit must part, with its unrealities, its *finesse*, its men-of-straw issues, and its slaughter of the slain. More and more, religion must come to correspond with the absolute nature of God and the absolute needs of man. Its work must be like every other kind of honest work,—the real fulfilment of real and not fictitious needs. Such work is well described in the Epistle to Titus, iii.

14. "Let our people learn to profess honest occupations for necessary wants that they be not unfruitful." [R. V. margin.] A real religion, a religion which has the air of realism and not of mere strategy, or mere sentiment, or mere orthodoxy about it, is one that is not accommodated to any figments or legal fictions imported into the processes of the divine nature. Nor must it, on the other hand, deal with the merely superficial, artificial, and accidental demands of men, but with the essential requirements of human nature. We must labour to meet real difficulties in a real, *bona fide*, and sympathetic way. We must learn to treat critics as friends, and make our enemies our helpers. They see what we don't if we see what they don't. We must court knowledge of the worst that can be said against us. We must not live in the fools' paradise of those who hold all criticism of our creed to be carping, malevolent, and gratuitous. We must learn to dread a security which rests more upon ignorance than open-eyed faith. These objections against us mean something. What do they mean? We, who profess to have

the key to life and the clue to truth, are bound to show that, and from our unique position, not simply refute scepticism, but interpret the sceptics to themselves. That is a process we can never go through without priceless gain on our part. No heretic or sceptic was ever yet sympathetically and rationally dealt with without a clear gain to our own position, the removal of parasitic growths or the dispersion of haze and mist. Nothing brings religion into more discredit than the air of unreality it acquires by secluding itself, in a spurious and valetudinarian sanctity, from vigorous direct and wholesome contact with the most real and vital problems and interests of contemporary life. This is a too prevalent blight upon the plants of God's planting. It is the phylloxera of the true Vine.

The second feature of a timely and needed Christianity is that it shall be—

2. Rational. I do not mean of course Rationalist. Rationalism is an out-grown phase of thought which is only not out-grown in England, because England is so far behind in everything pertaining to religious thought. The Reason of Man is the total and aggregate power of his spirit. It is the complete unity and faculty of all that constitutes him man. Faith is one of its prime functions and Love its joy and crown. To this, above all things, Christianity above all religions appeals. Its appeal is not to the logical faculty alone, nor to the emotional, but to the combined unity of heart, thought, will, and social nature. Nothing is so permanent, nothing so universal, as what is reasonable. A universal and eternal religion must be rational. To be vigorous and fertile, it must be rational. Sweet reasonableness is not a flabby thing. If it ever seems weak it is one of the weak things of the world that confound the dogmatist and the bully at last. It is the dogmatisms of vigour and rigour that are not permanent. It has often been said that it is the ultra Conservatives who are the true revolutionaries. It is these rigid dogmatisms that are least permanent, because they are most left behind. We shun the man of dogmatic unreason in private life, and the world resents and deserts his counterpart in a church or an age. Men are very persuasible, very teachable, to rational methods. For man is after all the reflected mind of God, and it was no Gospel of Unreason that the Son of God came forth to preach.

But in the third place, the Christianity which is to be timely must also be—

3. Liberal. The Spirit of God is a most subtle and pervasive Spirit, and His commandment is exceeding broad. The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of the created world. As the world and the soul grow, there grows also the Spirit of Christ.

If it be God's Eternal Nature ever to reveal Himself, then the religion which answers to such Revelation must be progressive. Only if God ceased revealing Himself would it be possible to make any stage of revelation final. The Bible is not a *terminus ad quem*, it is a *terminus a quo*. It is not a sea, it is a source, perennial indeed, but final, no. It is a great injustice to any past to invest it with that absolute despotism which history makes it its business to undo. It is a libel too upon the processes and purposes of God, and it is no less unjust to present and future. The half has not yet been told, and modern art, science, and politics contain a revelation of God no less real than any uttered by holy men of old. Not less real, I say. I do not say exactly the same. I do not say superior. I only say no less real. The Revelation of God in man is at least as *real* in the history of man at large as in the forecast of man in Christ Jesus. Nature and history reveal God as truly though not as profoundly as Prophet and Christ. The principle, the criterion, and what scholars call the Norm of revelation is given once for all in the New Testament, with its Christian idea, consciousness and personality. But its horizon is infinite and its fertility unbounded. And it is a principle which commits us to the widest sympathies, the keenest receptiveness, much docility of demeanour, and a respectful recognition of the Christianity outside the Church. And it is not because we are not sure that we are so ready to learn. It is not the mere seeker after Truth, but the man who has found Truth, that is most able and eager to deal with new Truth. It is not the inquirer that is modest—he is often pert—but the finder; and the modesty of science is due not to its ignorance and its quest, but to the great confidence and reserved strength which it has in the possession at last of the true scientific method. And such is the confidence of faith which we have in Christ. We have found the method of Humanity.

A liberal Christianity being a rational Christianity, is opposed to a Christianity merely authoritative, traditional, and crystalized. No age of the Church, from Christ's small company downwards, has enjoyed total immunity from error. No age, therefore, or its products, is beyond criticism, or beyond development. Nay, the test of a great past age is just its capacity for being left behind, its faculty of outgrowing itself, its wealth of germinal power to become superior to itself and pass into something which includes itself. Dead small ages will not develop, and cannot be outgrown; they can but be swept away, like the sterile civilizations of Mexico or Cambodia.

Christianity, at least in Protestantism, is a perpetually self-regenerating power. As the Christian man must examine

himself, outgrow, correct, and readjust himself to his infinite standard, so with the Christian community, and the Christian creed. Protestantism is Christianity in its aspect of self-regeneration. It represents that property of ever-living spirit, that instinct of self-preservation on the part of Christianity, by which it varies to meet new conditions, and so escapes from death by the fixities and falsities of history. Onward, onward, ever, but ever in Christ Jesus. It will be time for us to stop and return when we have left Him behind.

4. The religion required by the needs of the hour must be, fourthly, a social religion. This does not mean, as already said, a Christianity given up to many meetings and much recreation, but a Christianity which has the secret of the social idea, and so is capable by its very nature of organising and dominating human society. If man be the product of the Love and Reason of God, then the Love of the living God must be the influence which co-ordinates all his parts, and the music to which his members fall into beautiful place. The great test for Christianity in the future is the social test. Is it competent to carry out the re-organization of society on a basis of reasonable love? Has it power to meet the aspirations, heal the wounds, and reform the abuses of society? Can it readjust the social machine, and give us all the blessings and none of the dangers of Socialism? Can it give us, without Revolution, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, and raise these to godly significance? Can it provide a career to talent, room to labour, security to enjoy the fruits of labour? Can it assure every man of a future, and so expand for every man his present? Can it lift the load of hopelessness which weighs down whole classes, and makes thrift and prudence either futile or impossible? Can it do such things as these, and set current society on the basis of a social idea which is eternal, and a Social Being who is God? If not, let it make room for one that can.

A social religion is one opposed (1) to the spirit of caste, privilege, and monopoly, especially in respect of religious conviction or of pecuniary position. It aims at stripping the social idea of its worldliness, and making an unworldly earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Its aristocracy is a spiritual aristocracy, its warfare knows nothing of militarism, its priesthood is royal of soul, its peerage is the roll of excellence and the record of goodness, its politics is the pure application of pure principle, and its commerce is the glad satisfying of the brotherhood's need. A social religion is opposed, first, to the spirit of caste and the mere clash of interests. But it is opposed (2) to a Christianity merely popular, numerical, and common-place. Christianity is just as little to be sacrificed to

the poor as to the rich. To make it serve either end of the social scale exclusively is to limit and weaken it. The Pharisee, with his popular religion, was no nearer Christ than the refined, superior, and exclusive Sadducee. Indeed, it was the popular religionists of the day that slew Christ. The Church and the Church idea is the meeting point of the whole community. It is a spirit, power, and presence which, like God in the Universe, places, holds, binds, and balances all. No man or class has more right to the love of God than another. Why should the rich be robbed of the help Christianity can give them to endure their wealth any more than the poor of its help to abide their poverty?

These things and many more are not only demanded by the age from our religion, but demanded by our religion from us. Our concessions must not be compelled but inspired. We do not serve a Christ who comes laggardly forth at the repeated call of an alien time. But the Christ we serve is the power who inspires the time's great needs and prescribes its high demands. To keep us of the Church meek, our Lord's voice comes to us often by the mouth of the world; but woe be to us if we know not His call in whatever guise. The spirit will then have departed from us, as from some of us it has all but gone, and we shall be left to wither and die while from the very stones God raises up children to Abraham.

Let us, my dear friends, rise to the height and breadth of our high vocation. Let us court the things that are of noblest seeming and of godliest report. Let us repudiate the pride which sometimes goes with our Faith, the prejudice which is apt to go with Love. Let us eschew the banalities of belief, and the trivialities of doubt. Let us rise to the measure of our Christ and live on the wealth of His most excellent glory. Let Him refashion life for us and renovate duty. Let us be rigid first with ourselves. Let us pass into His Life by His Death. Let us widen all our views by letting Him widen our heart and increase our Life. Let us labour in the presence of an Infinite Destiny, and grow in the bosom of the Illimitable God.